Ji Kang's Criticism of Confucian and Naturalistic Music Theory*

Jiyeon Kang
Seoul

Introductory Remarks by Jonathan P. J. Stock

Ji Kang (223–62 or 224–63 CE, sometimes Xi Kang, following a historical pronunciation preferred by his family) was a Chinese philosopher, poet, dissenter, and musician, with a reputation also as a drinker and an alchemist. Connected by marriage to the initial ruling faction of the Kingdom of Wei, the northernmost of the Three Kingdoms that emerged as rival states from the fall of China's Han Dynasty (220 CE), Ji became a leader of a free-thinking group who named themselves The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove. The group courted controversy, not least in setting their collective intellect against the Confucian ideologies that had been prevalent throughout much of the preceding Han period and remained in vogue at the Wei capital. They argued, for example, that court rites were inefficacious, and they lived according to distinctly un-Confucian moral codes. Ji was executed after being denounced by members of a rival court faction, and while his followers were silenced in the short-term, his attempt to withdraw from direct court life and lead an independent but publicly critical existence on his country estates became an established archetype for later generations of disaffected intellectuals.

Ji's family connections, the visibility with which he took up his alternative lifestyle, and his leadership abilities already marked him as a target for the new regime, but his attacks on the era's musical orthodoxies are particularly remarkable from today's perspective, for in imperial China music carried immense symbolic importance. Numerous sources over the seven or more centuries preceding Ji Kang's birth had identified music as an unseen cosmological force, and set out the ways in which its proper exploitation by the ruling classes would help to tune the nation. In some accounts, the ruler's legitimacy rested exactly on his ability correctly to maintain music-infused rites.[1] In a famous essay, Ji struck at the heart of these beliefs. Instead, he argued that musical sound contains neither sorrow nor joy (*sheng*

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* This work is based on the author's master's thesis: Jiyeon Kang, "Jikang's Criticism and Natural Art Theory" (master's thesis, Ewha Womans University, 1996).

1 See further Jonathan P. J. Stock, "Four Recurring Themes in Histories of Chinese Music," in *The Cambridge History of World Music*, ed. Philip V. Bohlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 397–415 for a larger-scale historical overview that goes up to the present day, or Erica Fox Brindley, *Music, Cosmology, and the Politics of Harmony in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012) for a detailed account of the period c. 500–100 BCE, when most of these ideas were initially set in place.

wu ai le lun), although musical sound may release them when they are already latent within the heart of the listener. If today this view seems primarily an interesting philosophical distinction, in its time and context it was intensely, provocatively counter-cultural: a retreat from court life to the apparent seclusion of the bamboo grove and a claim that music was deeply personal were far, indeed, from the projection of exemplary public responsibility expected of the state's Confucian leaders.[2]

Ji Kang's revolutionary ideas mark a turn to what historians now call a Neo-Daoist stance, and ideas like his were, over the next several centuries, gradually to displace those of Confucians across the whole of China. Neither Confucianism nor Daoism was monolithic, and neither is easy to summarize, but they necessarily share areas of focus. If the Confucian accrues responsibility for the good of those around him in a rigid social hierarchy, the Daoist seeks a more personal way through life. The Confucian strives dutifully to influence and control the supernatural while the Daoist attempts to shed personal desire and will, accepting that humanity is only one fragment of a bigger natural whole.

Numerous writers have associated Ji Kang's own musicianship directly with these notions, noting that he played the classical Chinese seven-stringed zither *qin*, the symbolism and repertory of which today remain deeply suffused with Daoist imagery. Tradition has it that Ji played the large-scale *qin* piece "Guangling san" as a gesture of farewell immediately prior to his execution, and that he had learned this item from a mystical visitor late at night, probably the ghost of a previous courtier executed in immoral times. Ji refused to teach the music to anyone else, although a nephew succeeded in covertly overhearing some sections that later became part of the instrument's canon.[3] If this seems fanciful, Ji Kang's poem "Qin fu" (Ode to the Qin)[4] remains a significant organological source. Not only is it one of the earliest literary sources describing this important instrument in depth, but it happens also to fall in the middle of a period of five or so centuries for which we have no surviving instrument specimens.[5] Much concerned with the aesthetic of the instrument, Ji's poem also details the process through which suitable wood is discovered, an instrument is constructed, and its sounds produced. To provide a single instance, his description of the inlaid studs, *hui*, which guide the movements and positioning of the player's left hand, confirm that the instrument had already taken on a format still recognized today.

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2 Kenneth J. DeWoskin, *A Song For One or Two: Music and the Concept of Art in Early China* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan Press, 1982), 106.

3 See also John Thompson, "02. Guangling Melody," accessed 26 February 2014, http://silkqin.com/02qnpu/07sqmp/sq02gls.htm.

4 See further the translation by Robert H. van Gulik, *Hsi K'ang and His Poetical Essay on the Lute* (Tokyo: Sophia University Press, 1941).

5 Bo Lawergren, "The Metamorphosis of the *Qin*, 500 BCE–CE 500," *Orientations* 34, no. 5 (2003): 35.

Ji Kang's Naturalistic Theory of Music

In this article I argue that the naturalistic inclinations of Ji Kang's theory of music suggest that music contains neither grief nor joy and that this theory (*Xing wu ai le lun*)[6] is the first full-scale aesthetic hypothesis in China. Ji's criticism of the Confucian "ritualistic music theory" (*li yue lun*) subordinates aesthetic consciousness to ethical consciousness. In the article I attempt to show the practical nature and aesthetic consciousness of naturalism, as well as Ji's ontological basis. Ji directly opposed Confucian music theory.[7]

The naturalistic school of thought embodied in Ji Kang's theory holds that human beings are part of all natural things. Because they are part of nature, humans do not ascribe their existence to any transcendental, primary cause. In this view, the existence of any human being is self-sustainable, and humans are capable of making their own lives as full as possible. Thus, while human beings exist as independent entities, they live according to the governing principles of nature.

This naturalistic understanding can be applied to the art of music. Just as humans are a part of nature, music itself is also a part of all things within nature. Music originates in nature and is thus not endowed with human emotions such as joy, anger, grief, and happiness. Because music originates within nature itself, harmony or dissonance do not stem from human values or efforts. Music transcends happiness, love, anger, joy, or grief, although each of these emotions can be aroused by music to affect individuals and social interactions. Ji's theory of music tends toward such ontological understanding of nature and this "naturalistic theory of music."

The main characteristic of Confucian music theory, in contrast with naturalistic theory, lies in its emphasis on music as a political instrument. Confucians ordered society according to hierarchical distinctions and simultaneously attempted to harmonize distinct classes through music. By connecting the basis of music theory to the order of the universe, music helped to justify the Confucian establishment.

By emphasizing that music has no inherent emotion, neither grief nor joy, Ji criticized Confucians by exposing the underlying political implication of the Confucian ruling order and its music theory. Ji argued that there must be a clear distinction

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6 Ji Kang's writings survive in the collected writings of Ji Zhong. The page numbers cited throughout this essay refer to Robert Henricks's translations in *Philosophy Argumentation in Third-Century China* (Hsi K'ang, *Philosophy and Argumentation in Third-Century China: The Essays of Hsi K'ang*, trans. Robert G. Henricks [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983]). As is conventional in academic writing, the *pinyin* method is adopted for Chinese terms.

7 For more on Ji Kang's writings, refer to Robert G. Henricks, "Introduction," in Hsi K'ang, *Philosophy and Argumentation*, 3–15; see also Zhang Huihui, *Research into Jikang's Musical Aesthetic Thought* (Taipei: Wenjin Press, 1997); Ronald Egan, "The Controversy over Music and 'Sadness' and Changing Conceptions of the *Qin* in Middle Period China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 57, no. 1 (1997): 5–66; and David Chai, "Musical Naturalism in the Thought of Ji Kang," *Dao* 8, no. 2 (2009): 151–71. While Chai explores the features of Ji Kang's thought in the history of *Wei Jin Xuanxue*, I present the main features of Ji's musical aesthetics by illuminating his criticism of Confucianism and naturalism in his music theory.

between a subjective value system of humans and an objective, factual world of nature. He stressed the neutrality of the natural world, especially nature's independence from human values. He supported the idea that human beings have no right to govern nature with their value system. Rather, human beings are a part of nature and can feel supreme joy only when they obtain the most natural state.

Through his approach, Ji Kang recovered the significance of the existence of music. Instead of the obsolete music theory that emphasized the social utility of music, Ji's criticism and music theory helped to reestablish the appropriate position of art in its original sense. Music could claim its own importance and nature, no longer subordinated to human emotions or societal inclinations. Music came to have its own purpose and value in and of itself, not born of human intention.

Prior to the Wei Jin period in which Ji Kang lived, art did not occupy its own specific definition in the system of social specialization, but rather covered almost all professional areas of human life. The varied facets of human activity, ranging from communication and interchange among humans (languages), through the institutions of human society (morality, religion, law, and politics) and objective law of the world (science), to the development of the human body (sports), were all thought to exist within "art." As social specialization developed, these functions of art were differentiated from each other. Still, art continued to be regarded as a substitute for other activities, rather than as an independent discipline.[8]

In ancient China, art served more functions than mere pleasure. The function of art grew in importance when historically dominant groups wanted to legitimize themselves for governance and tried to impose rules that forced members of society to subscribe to universal, representative values. Because art is capable of influencing emotions basic to human behavior, it can inspire voluntary social accord. Within this context, art is considered not merely a speculative pleasure-giving object.

In China, since antiquity, a synthesis of all forms of art—poetry, song, and dance—has been called "music." According to the standard Confucian understanding of music, this synthesis was subsumed under the rubric of a "ritualistic music theory." Confucian music theory had become more sophisticated by the time of Xunzi,[9] and further theoretical refinement was forged with the "Record of Music" (*Yue Ji*) chapter of the *Book of Rites* (*LiJi*).[10] In order to clarify Ji Kang's criticisms of the

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8 Moiseĭ Samoĭlovich Kagan, *Vorlesungen zur marxistisch-leninistischen Ästhetik*, trans. Ullrich Kuhirt (Berlin: Dietz, 1975), 1:264.

9 Xunzi (Hsun Tzu) was one of the most sophisticated and influential philosophers during China's Warring States period (479–221 BCE). He considered himself a follower of Confucius and was one of the central early figures in the consolidation of what came to be thought of as the Confucian tradition. His writings address topics ranging from economic and military policy, through the justification of traditional authority and institutions, to action theory and the philosophy of language.

10 The *Book of Rites* (also translated as *Classic of Rites* or *Record of Rites*) was one of the Five Classics of the Confucian canon. It described the social forms, governmental system, and ceremonial rites of the Zhou Dynasty (1046–256 BCE). The "Record of Music," derived from the lost Classic, is one

Confucian theory of music, I turn in the following sections to a brief description and exploration of two Confucian theories of music, specifically Xunzian theory and its Confucian counterpart from the *Book of Rites*.

A Confucian Perspective on the Correspondence between Emotion and Sound

Confucian music theory holds that music reflects virtue. This proposition is persistently noted in Xunzi's theory on music: "Music was enjoyed by the sage kings; it can make the hearts of the people good; it deeply stirs men; and it alters their manners and changes their customs."[11] Xunzi recognizes that music transforms and moves the thoughts and feelings of people. Xunzi also contends that

> [m]usic is joy. Being an essential part of man's emotional nature, the expression of joy is, by necessity, inescapable.
>
> This is why men cannot do without music. Where there is joy, it will issue forth in the sounds of the voice and be manifest in the movement of the body.[12]

He argues that music is something humans must experience and feel, and that joy is created by music's voice and movement. Music, therefore, is perceived to be inseparable from human nature. Music is created and produced following the needs of human nature. The rationale for music and music's origin lies in the human heart. Human emotions (*qing*), therefore, produce sounds (*sheng*). Sounds have their foundations in the particular emotions of each human being. Voice, denoting some emotions, undergoes transformation and gives rise to other emotions.

Xunzi argues that music created from human needs should be pliable and revisable following social norms. Accordingly, human desires are drawn from nature, and all human beings share them. He argues, nonetheless, that actions taken to realize desires have to be controlled artificially. Music, thus, plays the role of nurturing and controlling the paths to these desires.

The *Book of Rites* outlines the concept of rites (*li*), whose purpose is to establish order within human society. Ritual does not play a role merely to moderate selfish human desires, which are designated as the roots of social disorder. Rather, the purpose of ritual lies in culturing and establishing mutual harmony between human desires and goods. Ritual provides a force for advocating moderation and self-constraint, giving order to human society by clearly determining the vertical hierarchy of social roles. The concept of rites argues for the establishment of *li*-compatible

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chapter in the *Book of Rites* and is the earliest fully-developed treatise on music to survive from the Chinese textual tradition. It was written no later than the middle of the Western Han period (second and first centuries BCE), but perhaps even earlier. It is thought, therefore, to contain a large amount material dealing with music from the Warring States period (403–221 BCE).

11 John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, vol. 3, *Books 17–32* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 83 (20.2).

12 Ibid., 80 (20.1).

distinctions (*fen*) required for a stable social order. Human society, however, is not merely maintained by a hierarchy of social distinctions. Social integration and harmony are additional fundamental attributes preserving order, which, according to Xunzi, depend on music. In his view music is inseparable from harmony, and *li* is also inextricable from reason. "Music joins together what is common to all; ritual separates what is different."[13] Xunzi explains, furthermore, that music is the most effective means to government,[14] thereby emphasizing music's role in maintaining social harmony. He provides evidence for the ways music fulfills social ethics thus:

> Hence, when music is performed within the ancestral temple, lord and subject, high and low, listen to the music together and are united in feelings of reverence. When music is played in the private quarters of the home, father and son, elder and younger brother, listen to it together and are united in feelings of close kinship. When it is played in village meetings or clan halls, . . . old and young listen to the music together and are joined in obedience. [Hence, music brings about complete unity and induces harmony.][15]

This passage demonstrates Xunzi's contention that when rites are performed in the household, community, and nation, they engender expression of reverence and honor toward superiors and encourage obedience. The idea of using ritual music as a means to govern is also found in the "Record of Music" chapter of the *Book of Rites*. This functional approach to social harmony again illuminates the tendency in the Confucian theory of music to view music as a political and social tool.

Ritual, Music, and the Cosmological Order

In the "Record of Music" chapter of the *Book of Rites*, it is said that "Ritual, Music, Punishment, and Administration—their ends are one: they are that which is used to unify the people's hearts and put forth the Way of Governance."[16] Accordingly, the purpose of music is to create order not only within the hearts of individuals, but also within society as a whole. As a source of the Confucian perspective on music, the "Record of Music" is quite representative, enriching and deepening earlier theories of music.

Xunzi's basic claim that music brings about appropriate social function is eminently laid bare here:

> Music (*yue*) serves to unite; Ritual serves to differentiate (*yi*). With uniting there is mutual closeness; with differentiation there is mutual respect. When Music gains the upper hand there is reckless abandon (*liu*). When Ritual gains the upper hand there is estrangement (*li*). To unite

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13 "Music embodies harmonies that can never be altered, just as ritual embodies principles of natural order that can never be changed" (ibid., 84 [20.3]).

14 "Music is the most perfect method of bringing order to men" (ibid.).

15 Ibid., 81 (20.1). The last phrase is not included in Knoblock's translation, but can be found in Xunzi's original text. I added the phrase here in my own translation.

16 Scott Cook, "*Yue Ji*—Record of Music: Introduction, Translation, Notes, and Commentary," *Asian Music* 26, no. 2 (1995): 28 (1.2).

> (*he*) the emotions and to polish external appearances—these are the affairs of Ritual and Music.
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> If the deportment of Ritual is established, then the noble and the plebeian are separated into classes. When the patterns of Music are uniform, then those in high position and those in low position get along in harmony.[17]

The rationale that music should be used to maintain social and national order lies in its power to arouse human spontaneity. The "Record of Music" declares that "Music comes out from within, Ritual comes into being from without."[18] It follows that, if "Music reaches the ultimate, there are no grievances. If Ritual reaches the ultimate, [the people] do not struggle [with one another]."[19] As to the social efficacy of rites and music, the tone is transparent: "The governance of all under Heaven through deference is what is meant by Ritual and Music."[20] The essence of this passage in this context signifies governing through the medium of ritual and music. As a means to justify political authority, ritual and music formed a connection to the foundation of nature and cosmology. "Great Music shares in the harmony of Heaven and Earth. Great Ritual shares in the regulation of Heaven and Earth. . . . Music is the harmony of Heaven and Earth. Ritual is the order of Heaven and Earth."[21]

As a result, ritual and music are not merely confined to regulating human action as a moral instrument, nor do they merely produce organized sounds pleasant to the ears. They become a foundational origin of nature, the root of human existence; they become, thus, a body of harmony. Music described in this way is of metaphysical origin and possesses a supernatural capacity to oversee both natural order and human society. The distinction between the noble and the ignoble, or between the old and the young, originates from music immanent in human beings.

This line of thought, insofar as it identifies the source of music with origins of the universe, is not unique to Confucianism. The "Record of Music" is founded upon Confucian music theory, but it incorporates elements of Daoism as well: the learning of the *Book of Changes* (*Yi xue*),[22] *Yin Yang* thought,[23] and *Wu Xing* thought.[24]

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17 Ibid., 42 (2.1).

18 Ibid., 43 (2.2).

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., 44 (2.3) and 46 (2.5).

22 The concepts in the *Book of Changes* grow from the *I Ching*. Some consider the *I Ching* as the oldest extant book of divination, dating from 1000 BCE, or earlier. The oldest manuscript, albeit incomplete, dates from the Warring States period (around 475–221 BCE), and its text was re-interpreted as a system of cosmology and philosophy that subsequently was regarded as intrinsic to Chinese culture. It centered on the ideas of the dynamic balance of opposites, the evolution of events as process, and acceptance of the inevitability of change.

23 *Yin Yang* thought, often referred to in the West as "Yin and Yang," literally meaning "shadow and light," describes how polar opposites or seemingly contrary forces are interconnected and interdependent in the natural world, and how they give rise to each other in relation to each other. In Daoist philosophy, dark and light appears in the *Daodejing* in chapter 42.

24 The *Wu Xing*, also known as the Five Phases, the Five Agents, the Five Movements, and the Five Steps/Stages, are chiefly an ancient mnemonic device, found in many traditional Chinese fields. In

Hence, this attempt to connect with the foundation of metaphysics is a result of the influences of both Daoism and modest naturalism. The defining characteristic of Confucianism, however, is shown by the way it explains music—namely, by attributing human emotions and values to the gathering and dissipation of all the universe's creatures.

According to Confucian thought, human emotions such as joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure are the result of the condensation and dissipation of matter (*qi*). Human emotions and nature's sounds arise from the same source; human emotions, thus, are produced as sounds of nature and transmitted to others who are composed of this same quality and form. This results in emotional correspondence between human beings. In this context, rulers can read the hearts of the people via music. Similarly, the dispositions of rulers are transmitted to the people. Through such correspondence, Confucianism attaches Confucian virtue to the Heavenly order. Confucians invest human willpower in the meaning and order of the heavens. The resulting theory of this Confucian viewpoint is that things in nature are endowed with teleological volition, and sounds are imbued with human volition and emotions.

The core of Confucian "ritualistic music theory" posits that music contains grief and joy within it. Sound connotes subjective human emotions and fully manifests the virtue of sages. This ritualistic music theory was handed down to Ruan Ji,[25] who believed it could forcibly drive home the social efficacy of music. His theory of music was in direct opposition to Ji Kang's.

Ji Kang's Criticism of the Confucian Theory of Music

Ji Kang's music theory, in contrast to Confucian theory, claims that music contains neither grief nor joy. His music theory should be regarded as the first aesthetic theory in China because it is based on Daoist naturalism and criticizes Confucian music theory with rich analyses and logic.[26] Ji's claim that music contains neither grief nor joy takes the form of a debate between the Confucian host of the eastern wilderness (*Dong ye zhu ren*) and a guest from Qin (*Qinke*), with the guest defending the tradi-

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Chinese texts on medicine the *Wu Xing* are also referred to as *Wu Yun* or a combination of the two characters. These uses emphasize the correspondence of five elements with five "seasons" (four seasons plus one). Another tradition refers to the *Wu Xing* as *Wu De*, the Five Virtues. The *Wu Xing* has customarily been translated as Five Elements probably because of the similarity of this doctrine to the Western system of four elements.

25 Ruan Ji was a poet and musician who lived in late Eastern Han Dynasty and Three Kingdoms period of Chinese history. He was one of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove.

26 The Research Institute of Aesthetics, sponsored by Philosophy Institute of CASS (China Academy of Social Science), has published a book on China's history of aesthetics (Li Zhehou and Liu Gang Ji, eds., *A History of Chinese Aesthetics* [Taipei: Guofeng, 1988]). In the introduction, Ji Kang's music theory is regarded as the first thesis on aesthetics with theoretical and analytical rigor.

tional view. The host of the eastern wilderness represents Ji Kang himself and the guest from Qin symbolizes a Confucian music theoretician.

Confucianism claims that the sound of music carries the meaning and emotion of humans. In an attempt to substantiate this claim, the guest from Qin takes the example of Gelu, who knew that his cow grieved and lamented that her calves had been sacrificed. Ji criticizes every aspect of the implication of that idea:

> If that cow from Lu knew that her calves had been sacrificed one by one, and was able to grieve that her three children no longer existed, to hold in her sorrow through the years and bellow her lament to Gelu, then this is a case of having the heart and mind of a human; she differs only in her animal form. But this is something about which I have doubts.[27]

Ji Kang means to say here no more than that cattle are not the same species as human beings, and the two have no mutual means of communication. His aggressive refutation continues:

> If birds and animals are both able to speak and Gelu received a special talent by which he alone could understand them, then this is a case of discussing their affairs by interpreting their language, like translating and transmitting a foreign tongue. Since it is not a matter of knowing someone's feelings by examining their music, this is not a valid criticism of my position.[28]

In Confucianism, the prevailing position is that "someone who is wise will thoroughly understand something as soon as he comes into contact with it, and that there is nothing he will not know."[29] Ji Kang, however, keenly doubts such claims, asking instead: "If a sage all of a sudden found himself in the lands of the Hu barbarians, would he understand their language or not?"[30] Ji provides his own analysis in the following passage:

> Must he have repeated contact and exchange with them, and then get to know their language? Or, will he blow on the pitch pipes and play the bamboo tuning tubes and in this way examine their music? Or, will he observe their manners and examine their facial expressions and in this way know their minds? This [the latter] would be a matter of knowing one's mind naturally from his ear and appearance. Even though he himself said nothing, you could still know his mind. Thus, the way of knowing does perhaps not rely on words. If you can blow on the pitch-pipes and examine their music, and in this way know their minds, then even if someone had his mind on a horse but by mistake said "deer," the examiner would definitely know from "deer" that he meant "horse." This means that one's mind is not related to what one says and what one says is perhaps not sufficient to verify what is on one's mind. . . . Language is not something that is by nature fixed. The five regions have different customs; the same thing has different designations. We simply select one name and use it as a sign. Now, the sage exhausts the principles. This means that whatever is natural can be examined; there

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27 Hsi K'ang, "Music Has in It Neither Grief nor Joy," in Hsi K'ang, *Philosophy and Argumentation*, 86.

28 Ibid., 87–88.

29 Ibid., 88.

30 Ibid.

> is no obscurity that cannot be illuminated. But if the principle involved is hidden, then you will not see it even if you are close by. Therefore, the language of a different land cannot be forcibly understood.[31]

Through this exchange, Ji argues that a person's mind does not have an essential relation to language and, in some cases, language is not even sufficient to manifest thought. We infer from this that the articulation of language does not possess intrinsic meaning; one meaning can be expressed in an array of languages. Similarly, the proposition that a single thing can be expressed in many languages signifies that language does not have a fixed correspondence to the human mind. We see here two aspects of language autonomy. First, language is not essentially related to what is manifest in the mind. Second, language chooses one ascribing names as opposed to another in a non-essential way. The meaning and the presentation of one word need not be essentially related; rather, they are artificially related and embedded in social customs, often used in social contexts. Ji claims, by extension, that if one applies this relation to language about music, meaning need not necessarily entail the intention of the composer. Accordingly, it is natural that actually listening to music makes multiple interpretations possible.

Ji Kang's claim that there is no fixed relation between the expected connotations and the true meanings of words coincides with a doctrine that language cannot exhaust meanings (*Yan bu jin yi lun*). This is embedded in *Wei Jin Xuanxue* thought (Neo-Daoism in Wei Jin era) and carries an important implication: a recipient of art can draw diverse and profound aesthetic impressions from an artist's intended message. The claim, furthermore, that language is deficient in revealing intentions of the human heart acknowledges the limitation of language, thus paving the way for a world of aesthetic intuition. Ji verifies this absence of a fixed correspondence between emotion and sound thus:

> Different regions have different customs; singing and crying are not done the same. If we mix them up and use them, some hear crying and are pleased; others listen to singing and become sad. But their feelings of grief and joy are the same. Now, if you use feelings that are the same to produce completely different sounds, is this not because music has no constant [relation to emotion]?[32]

In this aesthetic observation, Ji Kang uses differing customs in different regions and reveals extreme dichotomies, in which some hear crying and are pleased while others listen to singing and become sad. This explains how identical emotions can be expressed in different sounds. The expression of sounds relative to emotions has no consistency, hence proving that sounds do not express specific emotions. Though Ji's viewpoint is based on this premise, he does not contradict the traditional view that poetry and music are expressions of human emotion. Thus, when one says that two sounds whose main characters are the harmonious sounds, *gong* and *shang*,[33]

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31 Ibid., 87–88.

32 Ibid., 74.

33 The first and second notes, respectively, of the ancient Chinese scale.

are considered the most moving, Ji claims that the sounds are devoid of consistency (*yinsheng wu chang*). Sound itself is not indicative of any certain emotion, so only those who grieve, for example, will interpret the sounds as saddening.

If a harmonious note is devoid of constancy (*he yin wu chang*), the grieving heart hears something sorrowful. Ji Kang raises the question of how to know and say one of Zhuangzi's propositions, namely that "it blows differently through the ten thousand things but causes each to be itself (*Qu wan bu dong, Ershi qi ziji*)." Ji explains that the phenomenon of hearing only grief from a chord develops into a custom and when it reaches the point of influencing politics, all sound becomes sorrowful. This explains the claim that the sound of a nation in decline provokes sorrow. Ji explains that those who feel sorrow hear chords and perceive them only as sorrowful.

By understanding individual responses to music, therefore, one can also understand collective social formations. The crux of Ji's claims is that when sounds are devoid of consistency, there is no longer sorrow or joy in a chord itself. Emotions of sorrow and joy are contained and roused only through the human heart. The idea that identical emotions can be expressed through various sounds is a consequence of the proposition that the sounds are devoid of consistency. I interpret this as meaning that identical sounds can inspire different emotions, and there is no essential relation between sound and emotion. The sorrow or joy of a sound is determined by the sorrow or joy in a person's heart, not by the sound itself.

Ji Kang further regards sound as concrete in nature, thus to be distinguished from the subjective emotions of human beings. In his third discussion, Ji makes the assertion that "eating acrid things brings on hysterical laughter; smoke in your eyes causes grief-struck sobbing."[34] provides a case in point. In both cases, "tears are produced. But even if Yi Ya tastes them, he definitely will not say that the happy tears are sweet and the sad tears bitter."[35] Ji Kang compares the concrete nature of sound to wine, posing the following question:

> The tissues secrete water and it beads up in the flesh; when pressure is applied it comes out. It is not controlled by grief or joy. It is just like the process of straining wine through a cloth sack. Although the device used to press it through may differ, the flavor of the wine is unchanged. Musical sounds are all produced by one and the same source. Why must they alone contain the principles of grief and joy?[36]

How can we explain the situation in which emotion is roused simply by listening to music? The answer lies not in the proposal that a chord contains any symbolic content, but rather in the idea that subjective human emotion produces feelings. The following passage summarizes and elucidates this point:

34 Ibid., 84.

35 Ibid. Yi Ya lived during the Spring and Autumn period in the state of Qi. He was Duke Huan of Qi's beloved chef. When Duke Huan of Qi once commented that the only food that he had yet to try was the flesh of an infant. Upon hearing this, Yi Ya steamed his own child and served it to Huan.

36 Ibid.

> When it encounters harmonious sounds, only then is it released. Harmonious sounds have no sign, but the grieved heart has its essence. If you make the grieved heart that has an essence depend on the harmonious sounds that have no sign, then all you understand is the grief. How could you know, further, that "it blows differently through the ten thousand things but causes each to be itself?"[37]

Ji Kang asserts that sound has no original emotional content, but when sound arouses emotion, listeners attribute their own emotions to the sound. Thus, people's emotions are differently affected by hearing the same music. Evidence suggests that many understand Ji Kang's denial of specific emotional content in music, but most reading his theories regard them a misunderstanding. One might do better to read Ji's views thus: there is no consistent connection between emotion and sound, therefore identical sounds produce varying emotions. An individual subject's emotional state, furthermore, plays an important role in appreciating art. Aesthetic feelings are spontaneous and unpredictable, different from person to person. All of this is reduced to Ji's view on the consistency between emotion and sound. He believed that identical sounds produce varying emotional characteristics of art. If music is partial and fixed, simple and devoid of changes, then, even if it can express certain feelings, it cannot express varied feelings and multiple thoughts.[38]

Ji Kang's Separation Thesis: Heart and Sound Are Different

In the sections above I have outlined the main characteristics of Ji Kang's critique of the claim that sound has a fixed form. I now examine the proposition that heart (*xin*) and sound (*sheng*) are different objects. This proposition is a necessary implication of the contention that sound contains neither sorrow nor joy (*xing wu ai le lun*). Because sound is already unrelated to sorrow or joy, and because sorrow and joy are simply what our hearts are meant to feel, it follows that heart and sound are two different objects. Hypothetically speaking, if heart and sound are correlated to each other (i.e., if sorrow and joy are expressed through their corresponding counterparts in sound), it does not necessarily prove Ji's claim for a non-emotional nature of sound. To shore up the claim that sound contains neither sorrow nor joy, he would need to draw the logical conclusion that heart and sound are two distinct things.

Following Ji Kang's assertion, it is fair to say that the sound of music will move a human heart to feel. Human feelings or emotions are formed by the lyrics of music, thus making a clear distinction between the sound of music and human emotion. In music, sound is an external expression and feelings constitute its internal response. It is like making song sound by stimulating breath hard and making an old wind in-

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37 Ibid., 75.

38 Nakkyu Park, "Kodae jungkuk-ŭi yuga-wa toga aknon-ŭi kibon kwanjŏm" [Fundamental Views of Taoist Music Theory and Confucian Music Theory in Ancient China], *Romantic Music* 5, no. 2 (1993): 99–100.

strument produce sound by filling it with breath.[39] Accordingly, the sound of music carries natural and therefore produces objective responses. The following passage provides rich insights into how this line of thinking should be understood:

> That the good or evil of the sound of a cry does not come from the good or bad fortune of the baby's mouth is just like the fact that the clarity or the muddle in the sound of a lute or zither does not lie in the skill or clumsiness of the player. That the mind can distinguish principles and carry on skilled conversation but still cannot make a flute play smoothly, is just like the fact that a musician can be skilled in rhythms but cannot make his instrument sing pure and clear. An instrument is good with no dependence on the refined musician; the flute is harmonious but not because of the intelligent mind. This being so, then heart and music are clearly two separate things. Since the two are truly this way, then one who is seeking to know someone else's feelings does not spend time observing his appearance and form, and examining the mind does not rely on listening to sounds and tones.[40]

Ji Kang portrays music as one form of the player. That the mind can distinguish principles and carry on skilled conversation but still cannot make a flute play smoothly parallels the fact that nature and the human heart are two separate things. His basic argument that heart and sound are separate things is as follows: Taste is composed of bitterness and sweetness, whereas humans have both stupidity and perspicacity. Sweet taste makes people happy while bitterness makes people angry. Wise people care about others whereas stupid people hate others. Yet, happiness and anger lie within, sweetness and bitterness lie in taste, and love and hatred stem from me while perspicacity and stupidity come from without.[41]

According to Ji Kang, when one cannot call sweet taste "bitterness," call wise people "those of wisdom" or stupid ones "hateful people," it is because external objects (sweetness, bitterness, perspicacity, and stupidity) and internal human feelings (happiness, anger, love, and hatred) differ from each other. Ji juxtaposes objects and subjectivity, I believe, because original sweetness, bitterness, perspicacity, and stupidity attributed to external objects are distinguishable from one's own subjective feelings or emotions. Sorrow and pleasure are matters of internal human feelings and thus are not intrinsic to sounds.

The full text of the passage above implicitly concludes that naming (*ming*) is separable from reality (*shi*). In other words, calling music sorrowful and pleasurable does not relate to the actual sounds themselves. Ji does not rule out that happiness and anger are caused by wine, love and hatred by how wise or stupid people are, and sorrow and pleasure by sounds. He explains that the issue at stake here is one of *ming*, not *shi*: tastes are called sweet or bitter, people are called loving people or hating people, and sound is differentiated into sorrowful sound or joyful sound. A human's subjective emotional judgment of things is clearly different from the objective natural world.

39 Hsi K'ang, "Music Has in It Neither Grief nor Joy," 93.
40 Ibid., 91–92.
41 Ibid., 80–81.

The State of Pure Contemplation and the Utmost Pleasure of Musical Form

What would be the most accomplished state of music that transcends the human mind? Not only does Ji Kang pinpoint the internal contradictions of Confucianism on this issue, but he distinguishes the lyrics of music from the meaning of music, thus acknowledging the mutual autonomy of the two. He broadens the gamut of music as a source of enjoyment and promotes the view that music can be interpreted in multiple ways. I would extend the claim for no corresponding relation between sound and feeling even further, to an assertion that sound carries an objective "materialistic nature" separate from subjective emotions. This explains how one's feelings can be aroused merely by listening to music. Sounds arouse the human heart by allowing an individual to experience subjective emotions. Ji Kang's theory that music has in it neither sorrow nor joy has an ontological agenda: it purports to distinguish the sounds of nature from feelings, accounting for the ways listeners hear sounds according to this theory.

When humans transcend emotions of grief and joy, a true sense of the beauty of the form of music will be reached. I further believe that for Ji, the essential aspect of art does not lie in showing sorrow or joy but in expressing the limitless state of freedom that transcends the human realm of emotions. Ji refers to this elevation of the human mind as the state of mind without sorrow or joy. Ji Kang, I believe, takes the essence of art as something moving beyond personal interests and overcoming the thought as either good or bad.

Art cannot always transcend the bounds of particular lives or exist independently of emotions that result from pursuits of satisfying personal interests or making a distinction between right and wrong. What any form of art tries to express, however, is the utmost state of freedom embodied in and experienced by humanity. Thus, that art expresses human emotions should not be understood as an expression of one kind of emotion, but an expression of emotions closely associated with the experience of freedom. When revealing the dynamics of nature that are the roots of humanity, music moves the spirit to be actualized and unfettered. Although art may express some emotions experienced in the midst of personal lives, the ultimately sought-after point of expression should go beyond human emotions born out of personal interests and disparate judgments and values.

Ji Kang's position, I believe, is that any real pleasure should not be overwhelmed or eclipsed by sorrow or pain, but rather it should lie in the ideal place where pleasure is devoid of sorrow or joy. This level of pure pleasure perfectly harmonizes with nature, a heavenly harmony that results from establishing a comfortable harmony with the dictates of nature. In his own theory of music, Ji takes music as nature itself, and does not regard the origin of music as beyond the natural world. Quite the contrary, he searches for the foundation of music's existence within nature.

Through the medium of music and in unison with nature, human beings experience the utmost joy of spiritual value—ultimate joy that is without joy (*zhe le wu*

le).[42] In order to savor this joy and attain ultimate beauty (*zhi mei*), a value judgment of right and wrong should be avoided. Ultimately, Ji's emphasis on a transcendent union with nature actually runs parallel to Confucianism's emphasis on ethical consciousness that encompasses aesthetic consciousness rooted in value judgments of right and wrong. When one hears music as such, aesthetic consciousness becomes attainable. Music's importance is not subsumed under philosophy and politics, but rather claims its own sphere and guarantees its own space. In this context, the value of music is no longer its instrumentalism. Music takes on its own teleology and an independent set of standards. Ji's discussion of the state of utmost pleasure in music appears to be very similar, if not identical, to Eduard Hanslick's emphasis on the state of pure contemplation.[43] Through listening, musical imagination resonates with the attentive perception of music and so induces enjoyment of the form and the sounds of music capable of self-construction. Such perception affords listeners freedom and direct contemplation.

By claiming that music contains neither grief nor joy Ji Kang attempts to show that the nature of art refers to nothing more nor less than the unfettered, limitless freedom of each individual that transcends personal gains and interests. The purpose of art is transcendence from the realm of the secular world, for in this realm humans are bound by emotional attachments and limitations that consequently make them susceptible to agony and suffering. Individuals imbued with these very human emotions, if exposed to art, might possibly bring themselves to pursue and ultimately enter into the state of the limitless, free spirit. The harmony that goes beyond the realm of sorrow and joy, in fact, refers to this state of the limitless, freelancing spirit.

In Ji Kang's theory of music, the human spirit becomes more animated at the point of confluence of interplay between the internal power of nature and the spontaneous nature of humans, thereby liberating them. Human beings will partake of this spontaneous nature of the spirit and will become liberated and beautiful. Only the harmonious sounds that reveal and induce this liberated state can be called the art of music. At this point, music is no longer a means of moral edification that makes human beings follow a specific moral code or political creed. Art is now meaningful

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42 In David Chai's translation, *zhi yue wu yue* is the highest form of music of soundless music. I translate *zhe le wu le* as "the ultimate joy that is without joy." See also Victor Mair's translation (Victor H. Mair, *Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu* [Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998], 168).

43 The state of the utmost pleasure as conceptualized by Ji Kang coincides with Hanslick's view in *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* (Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful: A Contribution Toward the Revision of the Aesthetics of Music*, trans. Geoffrey Payzant [Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1986]) that one has to appreciate and review the form of music with an attitude of pure contemplation or pure intuition. While criticizing the aesthetics of emotions that explain the purpose and content of music from the vantage point of expression and transmission of emotions, Hanslick holds that the purpose of music can be found in the autonomous form of music itself, which is to be contemplated by the spontaneous and active spirit of human listeners. In his theory Ji Kang holds that music possesses neither grief nor joy as a naturalistic theory of music of ancient China.

for music's sake and serves as a conduit to the lofty realization of humanity's innate nature. Accordingly, art is no longer considered valuable because of its instrumental value, rather it becomes the carrier of teleological value and inherent value. Ji attributes inherent significance and worth to music by not following the Confucian view, according to which the inherent value and meaning of music should be subjugated to the realm of moral judgment. In this way, he establishes a theory for appreciating the deeper aspects of music's beauty.[44]

Conclusion

The contention that the sounds of music are based on the natural world and should be distinguished from subjective feelings of humans is the core of Ji Kang's critique of the Confucian theory of music. Confucian theory suggests that human feelings or emotions attributable to subjective value judgments contained in nature's sounds are merely the result of an illusion—an illusion based on the conflation of the natural world with the social order of human beings. The Confucian theory of music critiqued by Ji, thus, entails an interpretation of music only in the context of social customs, thus failing to account for music as a harmonious form of beauty.

For Daoists, music has to possess its own existential meaning as a harmonious sound of the natural world in order to further its self-creation in the dynamism of nature. When human consciousness reveals the dynamics at the root of its own natural existence, and therefore it can fulfill its freedom and, in so doing, come into being through creation. In the place where human nature and nature's internal forces share common ground, the human mind is spirited and elastic. As humans come to enjoy this natural character and the nature in and of themselves, they become free and beautiful. The harmonious sound that reveals and draws upon the natural beauty of humans is music. The purpose of art is to break out of the bondage of feelings and afflictions engendered by emotions and reach the unlimited freedom of the mind.

In his neo-Daoist aesthetic Ji Kang logically criticizes Confucian premises that purport to incorporate the sounds of music, whose nature is based in the natural world. He thus abandons the political and instrumentalist function of musical art. He observes that each individual is connected with others, but he also envisions a subject's consciousness to be further developed. True art has to make possible the creation of the consciousness of the free subject. To reach the highest beauty and experience bliss, humans must rid themselves of value judgments. This value-free position is in stark contrast with Confucian music theory. Such a realization, I believe, has profound implications for present day as well.

44 Although the author is primarily concerned with Ji Kang's philosophy and intellectual basis, it would also be useful to know something about his modern-day legacy. For related views in modern Chinese art history, see Fa Zhang, *A History of Chinese Aesthetics* (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2000), 88.

Music in Daoism is awarded its own independent place as a form of nature to stand on its own ground. Music, in and of itself, assumes independence and a sense of aesthetics through enriched possibilities. Music is not subsumed within philosophy and politics, but is accorded its own place as an art per se. As art, music embodies its own independence and essence. For Ji Kang there must be clear distinction between the subjective value system of human beings and the objective, factual world of nature. He stresses that nature exists in itself and is not tainted by any human value, rather humans are part of nature. In Ji Kang's naturalistic theory music should not be exploited to internalize human value systems. Instead, the meaning of music as art is to realize human nature as a force liberated and made creative through nature. Humans can feel ultimate joy that is without joy—*zhe le wu le*—only when they obtain the most natural state equivalent to being one with nature.

Glossary

Fen	分	Distinctions
Gelu	葛鹿	A name of the person from the *Tso Chuan*
Gong	宫	The first note of the Ancient Chinese scale
Guangling san	广陵散	Composition for *qin* either attributed to Ji Kang or associated with his name in many accounts
He yin wu chang	和音無常	Harmonious note is devoid of constancy
Hu	胡	Barbarians
Ji Kang	嵇康	
Li	禮	Rite
Li yue lun	禮樂論	Ritualistic music theory
Ming	名	Naming
Qi	氣	Energy
Qin	琴	Seven-stringed zither
Qin fu	琴赋	"Ode to the Qin"
Qing	情	Emotions
Qu wan bu dong, Ershi qi ziji	吹萬不同, 而使其自己	It blows differently through the 10,000 things, but causes each to be itself
Shang	商	The second note of the Ancient Chinese scale
Sheng	聲	Sound
Sheng wu ai le lun	声无哀乐论	Sound has neither sorrow nor joy theory: philosophy put forward by Ji Kang
Shi	實	Reality
Xing wu ai le lun	聲無哀樂論	Discourse on music has in it neither grief nor joy
Yan bu jin yi lun	言不盡意論	The doctrine that language cannot exhaust meanings
Yi xue	易學	The learning of the *Book of Changes*
Yi Ya	易牙	Duke Huan of Qi's beloved chef
Yinsheng wu chang	音聲無常	Sounds are devoid of consistency
Zhe le wu le	至樂無樂	Ultimate joy that is without joy
Zhi mei	至美	Ultimate beauty